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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000308

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDAN: ARRESTS SIGNAL NEW TOUGHNESS IN ISLAMIST
STRONGHOLDS

REF: A. 09 AMMAN 2770

[B](#). 09 AMMAN 2490

[C](#). 09 AMMAN 2451

[D](#). 09 AMMAN 1896

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (U) SUMMARY: In a rare foray into coverage of Jordan's internal security, Jordanian media reported on January 31 and February 1 two separate security campaigns which have yielded over 550 arrests. The first is a widely reported announcement by Jordan's Public Security Directorate (PSD) of over 500 arrests since November 2009 related to criminal activity, including theft and drug smuggling. The second report by Jordan's Islamist Al Sabil newspaper indicates that security forces have arrested more than 50 "members of the salafi jihadist trend" in the last two weeks in an investigation connected to the December 30 suicide bombing in Khost, Afghanistan.

[2](#). (C) Contacts in Jordan's security forces say that the criminal arrests are intended to signal a new toughness in Jordan's "hot zones" -- areas in which Jordanian security have traditionally had low penetration. Although the criminal arrests are not directly related to the Khost investigation arrests, Jordan's Islamists fear they are becoming increasingly pressured by security activity in their geographic strongholds. END SUMMARY.

Criminal Arrests Push into Jordan's Hot Zones

[3](#). (C) Contacts in PSD and the Gendarmerie say the criminal investigations and arrests are designed to target areas in which security forces have lower levels of control, including Azraq, Ma'an, Salt, Zarqa, villages in the Jordan River valley, and the neighborhoods of Saheb in East Amman and Lubban in South Amman. Likening these areas to mafia safe-havens, security contacts say that individuals suspected of larceny or drug smuggling can "disappear" there, protected by residents from investigation and arrest.

[4](#). (C) When security forces have tried to conduct investigations and arrests in these areas in the past, they have sometimes resulted in violent altercations between police and family or tribal factions as was the case in Ajloun in August 2009, (ref d), in the Hay Al Tafila neighborhood of East Amman in November 2009 (ref c), and in Ma'an in November 2009 (ref b).

¶5. (C) Deputy Director of PSD for Training and Operations Brigadier General Moh'd Abdullah Al Raqqad told POLOff that in the current security campaign, PSD is focused on alleviating clashes through "intelligence-based policing," an approach where security monitors the movements of a person of interest, apprehending him while in transit to work or while the risk of family or tribal involvement is otherwise low. He said he was personally coordinating this effort with the Gendarmerie and the General Intelligence Directorate (GID).

¶6. (C) (Comment: Intelligence-based policing is certainly not new to Jordan's security forces. It is likely the renewed effort has more to do with PSD asserting its leadership in coordinating related security agencies. END COMMENT.)

Islamists Fear Tighter Control in Salafist Strongholds

¶7. (U) In an separate report, the Islamist Al Sabil newspaper reported that at least 50 "salafist jihadists" had been arrested over two weeks, most from the cities of Salt and Zarqa. Al Sabil originally said they had been arrested in an investigation of the January 14 attack on a convoy of Israeli diplomats in the Jordan River valley. However, subsequent reports in Al Sabil and online sources said the investigation is in connection with the suicide bombing in Khost, Afghanistan.

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¶8. (C) Contacts at PSD told POLOff that the unusual public announcement of the criminal arrests was meant to distinguish it and PSD from the terror investigation in which they said PSD was not directly involved. "These investigations are not related," one contact said. "Ours started months ago and we want the public to know that."

¶9. (C) Still, Jordan's Islamists fear they are coming under increased scrutiny. Journalist and commentator Mohammed Abu Rumman, a former member of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood (JMB) who maintains professional contact with the JMB and the Islamic Action Front (IAF), told POLOff that PSD's criminal crackdown is striking at the heart of the Islamist movement's geographic base in Jordan. The arrests, investigations, and intelligence-gathering that led to it, he said, will result in better cooperation between security forces and local residents, break their traditional silence with security, and afford PSD better insight into criminal and non-criminal activity there.

¶10. (C) "Whether or not this is (PSD's) goal, the movement knows what will happen," he said intimating that the criminal crackdown could also be used as a cover for broader investigation and intimidation of Islamists.

PSD in the Press, But Gendarmerie in Driver's Seat

¶11. (C) The security campaign also highlights an emerging pattern in the cooperation between the PSD and Gendarmerie in sensitive and high-risk arrests (ref a). According to PSD officials, the Gendarmerie is supporting PSD by providing perimeter security and riot control when necessary as PSD conducts arrest operations.

¶12. (C) Gendarmerie officials tell a different story. They say the Gendarmerie is in charge of pre-operation intelligence gathering and arrest operations. Suspects are then being turned over to PSD custody for questioning, detention, and processing to a criminal trial once apprehended by the Gendarmerie.

¶13. (C) Press reports made no mention of the Gendarmerie's role in the criminal security campaign, citing only the PSD statements. A Gendarmerie official commented on that observation: "PSD is waving his hand from the window, but Al Darak (the Gendarmerie) is driving the car."

Comment

¶14. (C) Following a series of violent clashes between tribes and police in 2009, Jordan's security forces are coming under increased pressure to improve security and control in the toughest parts of the country, fix interagency cooperation problems, eliminate altercations that make headlines, and show results quickly. That pressure is likely coming from the highest levels of government and has intensified since the December 2009 Cabinet reshuffle in which the Gendarmerie director was sacked. (The PSD director has so far dodged a similar move to replace him.) The differences in account between PSD and Gendarmerie officials on this recent security campaign underscores that mistrust endures as their relationship continues to evolve. According to observers of Jordan's Islamist movement, many in the movement are resigned that the jockeying between PSD and Gendarmerie may come at their expense.

Beecroft